Your Most Improbable Life - by Kevin Kelly

KK kevinkelly.substack.com/p/your-most-improbable-life

Your life's goal should be to become the most improbable person you can be. Your path, your character, your life, should be the most unlikely, the most unexpected, the least predictable version you can make. Improbable lives have fewer competitors, more unique rewards, and are harder to replace with AIs, since AIs run on the predictable. This is true whether you favor traditional humanist directions or work on a frontier.

The strategy of seeking the most improbable life begins at the Big Bang. As far as we know there are two unbreakable laws in the universe: 1) Nothing travels faster than the speed of light, and 2) Everything runs down over time toward an end state of

absolute uniformity. This motionless destination “without difference”, is also known as heat death, or entropy. With universal entropy, everything moves toward sameness and the totally predictable.

Physics says a major caveat to universal entropy and sameness is that if you are able to accelerate the generation of entropy in some places, you can create systems that reverse entropy around it in a local region. Instead of running down, these pockets run up, gaining order, structure, organization, and unpredictableness, or what is called exotropy. The most celebrated system accelerating entropy and increasing exotropy, is life. The first bit of life was highly improbable, and each species of life it evolved increases its quotient of improbability.

If you take a deck of cards, throw them into the air, then gather them back into a deck, the order of those cards are highly, highly improbable. When you shuffle a deck of 52 cards the order of those cards will never be repeated again in the history of the universe, no matter how fast you shuffle. But if you take the deck of cards and throw them into the air, the chances of them falling into a tower of 52 cards resting on their edges stacked in 5 rows, as a child might build, is fundamentally near zero. Cards arranging themselves into a tower need an improbable system (a human) to accomplish this.

In the same way as cards, the self-improving system of life re-arranges random atoms in the universe into very improbable shapes we call proteins and amino acids. The same system arranges these unexpected molecules into very improbable organs, which are arranged into very improbable bodies. So long as they are alive, life maintains that improbable arrangement, keeping the whole body far from the dull sameness of entropy. That suspended relief from entropy is removed upon death, when the atoms in a dead body quickly revert to randomness.

Even more amazing, evolution is an additional system that keeps elevating the improbable. Over long periods of time evolution creates more complexity, more structure, and installs more information in living bodies, thereby increasing the flow of energy through them (which increases its rate of generating entropy), and thus upping their unlikeliness. The more complex a creature, the more improbable it is.

The grand arc of evolution moves from the limited choices available to a solo hydrogen atom, to the myriad shapes molecules can fold themselves into, to the overwhelmingly complex ways a giraffe or whale can order atoms in their bodies, to the astronomical numbers of new ways human minds can arrange atoms, or generate new behaviors and actions. This cosmic force flows through inert atoms to a simple universal cell to nearly impossibly complex machines, including newly made minds

like AIs. The direction of the entire universe flows toward increasing unlikeliness (while the rest of it runs downhill toward uniformity).

And this is true at the individual level as well. Every single individual creature alive on this planet is highly unlikely compared to the empty vastness of the universe. Even for simple creatures, its personal life story is highly improbable; the more complex the organism, the more complex the environment, the more improbable a life story it has.

As humans, we have added yet more complexity into the environment by inventing technology, opening up immense new regions of possibilities, and countless new ways to surprise the past. Every year we collectively make it easier and easier to make something new that the universe has never seen before. Not just on Earth, but in the universe. We are complex enough that our life will never be repeated, nor anticipated, on any planet in any galaxy in any part of the universe. No matter what you do, the sum of your life is unique and unrepeatable.

But it can be even more improbable. You can align yourself with this grand arc moving from the expected to the unexpected and aim to become the most improbable person you can be.

Here is what you gain with your most improbable life:

The authentic you. Your particular mix of talents, native abilities, personal inclinations, genetic limits, life experiences, and ambitious desires points to a mixture that is distinctly unique – if it is allowed to blossom. The further you move in that direction, the more you-like you become.

The more you-ish you become, the less competition you have, because you are occupying your own niche. Less competition means you don't have to be in a race; you can relax and focus on your strengths. You have the space to become even more you, and even less likely.

The more you occupy a category of one, the easiest it is for you to appreciate this trait in others. It becomes easier to see past the conventional, to identify authenticity, and to encourage the improbable in others. For some people that makes them great friends and mentors; for others this makes them good in backing and investing in the work of others on their way to being improbable.

Finally, the less predictable you are, the less likely you are to be replaced by AIs. Machines are efficient, and they are powered by the predictable. Current LLMs are trained to generate the most predictable solution. So far they are not very good at duplicating what a creative, one-of-a-kind improbable human can produce. To distance yourself from the machines, aim to be as improbable as you can be.